

Experiencing a Space Management Department Start-Up

By Kimberly Case-Nichols

When it comes to managing educational institutions, we inevitably share the challenges of space management and the nuances of how to deal with limited and inefficient use of space in our buildings. It is no surprise that space is one of the most expensive and valuable resources on our campuses. For this reason, our space management departments exist to ensure that fiscal responsibility is maintained, efficient and effective space practices are adhered to, and space utilization is managed and reported properly. For a space management program to be successful, its master plan must be aligned with the institution's mission and vision, and must have consistent executive sponsors to support and communicate the ever-changing landscape of the campus's physical space.

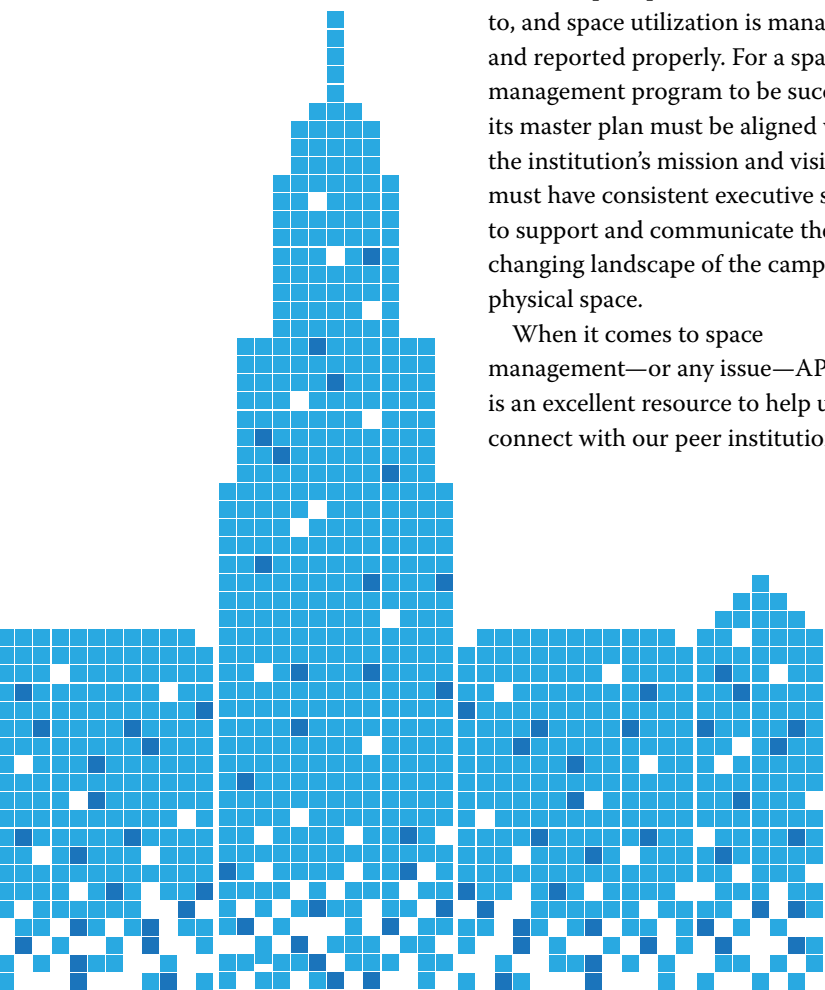
When it comes to space management—or any issue—APPA is an excellent resource to help us connect with our peer institutions and

share experiences so we can learn from each other and work together on meeting the challenges of facilities management. As an APPA member for the past 12 years, I strongly value the networking and training resources that have helped me develop as a professional and allowed me to contribute my knowledge and experience to this amazing organization.

In my role as director of space management at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), I had the unique opportunity to develop and implement the Space Management department, providing shared services to both the UNLV School of Medicine and UNLV Medicine Faculty Practice Plan. UNLV determined these new entities should have their own space and facilities departments apart from the main campus units, and I was hired to build the department from the ground up.

Both the college and practice plan teaching clinics began operation on July 1, 2017. The Faculty Practice Plan was an existing practice that UNLV Medicine absorbed. One of the concerning issues during this transition was that all 17 facilities involved were leased properties and did not come with complete floor plans, space assignments, or any infrastructure for a space management system. Additional challenges included no budget for a space management database as well as the mass onboarding and offboarding of staff in the first 12 months with no categorized space inventory.

As head of a new department, I had only one staff person to support facilities operation and space move logistics. The first 12 months saw explosive growth: The medical school and practice plan staff quickly grew to about 1,000 people, and in just that year alone, our personnel grew to one-third of the 3,000 staff on the main campus. Thus, the need to get a space management system in place was critical to



managing operations and maintaining productivity. In response, I developed collaborative relationships across campus service departments to build on existing systems, policies, and processes.

WORKPLACE CHANGE

During this transition, I quickly learned the peaks and valleys of workplace change management and the rooted emotional connection people have with their physical work space. Resistance and vulnerability were exposed among the workforce at many levels and could not be ignored. Priorities needed to be established quickly to get a handle on determining who the key decision makers were and ensuring that our space management principles aligned with the institution's mission and vision. The desired outcome was to create a "new normal" by determining the planned changes and observing how well staff, students, and patients adjusted to the new workplace environment. Changing the culture around space in the workplace was going to take some patience and finesse; therefore, thoughtful business strategies were needed to create a tactical business plan that would develop the department. I have outlined these strategies below.

FIRST-YEAR STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Identify who is involved

- Determine who the key players are in making decisions about space and define their roles.
- Partner with main campus departments including Space Management, Real Estate, and Planning and Construction.
- Create central governance and authority over space data.
- Develop a space committee to preside over space management program development.
- Assign space proxies from each department.

Identify key resources and department organizational needs

- Determine if there is a budget for space activities and funding models for renovations.
- Identify existing institutional resources that can be leveraged to support a brand-new department.
- Determine when reporting timelines are and what requirements need to be met.
- Determine what human resources are required to meet the demands of the department.



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Policies, procedures, and guiding principles

- Redefine the institution's thought process on space as a "shared resource."
- Develop guiding principles, policies, and procedures.
- Develop space request forms and processes to submit, review, and approve/deny space requests.
- Define space initiatives: space request versus project request.

Determine if there a business case for space change

- Take inventory of all space and associated costs to help decision-makers plan.
- Develop a common vision that supports equitable space management for both the medical school and the practice plan.
- Understand what the short- and long-term strategic plans are for the growing organization.
- Understand the drivers for change and develop the space plan roadmap over one to five years.

Manage space change


- Assess the culture of existing space use.
- Develop a transitional approach to support positive culture change.
- Develop metrics to collect data, measure progress, and expose gaps in the operation.
- Communicate and create a format for user input and collaborative discussion across departments.

FIRST-YEAR SUCCESS

There is no doubt that this first year of developing a new department has been exciting and challenging as well as an incredible career opportunity. Our Space Management shared services consolidated resources to serve medical education, clinical practice, and research. The department has been able to make significant progress developing under the strategies outlined above.

I relied heavily on strategizing these building blocks based on the respective needs of our business organization. I realized that while there are many books and how-to articles available about the

fundamentals of space management, there is no magic solution or one-size-fits-all approach for managing space or facilities operations. Nevertheless, there is one asset I could not have done without: I found that it was pivotal to reach out to APPA and find peers and resources to support this endeavor.

There were several moments when I felt like the challenges of building a new department were simply too great. But the benefits of having APPA resources at my disposal assured me that my struggles were not unique and that my tactical plan to create a successful space management department was attainable. Our industry managers and leaders continuously provide a wealth of information and training to support managing our ever-changing physical spaces on campus—and any other issues we may face. 

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